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Introduction and Issue Overview ***September, 2003***

True democratic public discourse hinges on media consolidation and ownership limits.

- Large group owners do less local political coverage than small or mid-sized owners. *See* “Local TV News Coverage of the 2002 General Election,” The Lear Center Local News Archive Project of the USC Annenberg School and Univ. of Wisconsin, July 23, 2003.
- Consolidation since the 1996 Telecom Act deregulated radio has already caused a spike in advertising rates, which deters many potential political candidates from running for office as the cost of broadcast airtime is the most expensive part of a political campaign. *See* Jon Mandel, Co-CEO of MediaCom, Testimony before Full Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, July 8, 2003; John Esserton, *Broadcasting & Cable*, July 14, 2003 at 6.

Digital broadcasters must meet political broadcasting obligations.

- At a minimum, current regulations should apply to digital broadcasters’ primary video channel. To the extent a broadcaster offers additional channels or services, the broadcaster should likewise meet comparable political broadcasting obligations. For instance, candidates should have equal access to all channels or services offered.
- Information on true sponsorship and funding of political advertisements should be fully disclosed and posted on broadcasters’ websites.

***Our Democracy, Our Airwaves* legislation would foster political discourse.**

- By mandating a limited amount of political broadcast programming and providing for political advertisement vouchers, S.1497 would provide for a more informed electorate and reduce financial obstacles for potential candidates.

Expedient implementation of Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act is essential.

- The Commission should move to quickly implement BCRA’s political broadcasting provisions, including giving broadcasters the tools and guidance necessary to ensure full and fair public disclosure regarding political advertising in time for the 2004 election cycle.